

**Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Field Memo**  
**Special Alert – H1N1**  
**October 5, 2009**

Information from Health Department on [H1N1](#) vaccination clinics  
– **Response Required**

[Minutes](#) of Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> school leadership conference call on H1N1

Attachments to this field memo alert:

- Supts-H1N1 Coordinator contact information form
- Wellness Company letter to principals on H1N1
- Wellness Company survey (for principals)

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**Information from Health Department on H1N1  
vaccination clinics**

I have received from Dr. David Gifford, the director of the Department of Health, the following letter regarding H1N1 flu vaccinations for all schoolchildren. This letter **asks you submit a form**, “Superintendents-H1N1 coordinator contact information” (attached), to the Department of Health.

I have also attached a letter for all school principals from the Wellness Company, which will coordinate and manage the H1N1 flu vaccination clinics; **please distribute this letter, along with the attached “Wellness Company Survey,”** to all principals in your district.

Here is the letter from Dr. Gifford:

Dear Superintendents, Director and Head Masters of Rhode Island Schools:

We are pleased to announce that the Rhode Island Department of Health in partnership with the RI Department of Education, The Wellness Company, and the support of the State's Medical Reserve Corp, will be coordinating and managing the H1N1 flu vaccinations for all school children in grades kindergarten through grade 12 in the State of Rhode Island.

Vaccination will take place in all schools, public and private. Students enrolled in grades K-5 (and students attending schools with mixed elementary and secondary populations) will be vaccinated after school hours, with a parent or guardian in attendance. Students in grades 6-12 will be vaccinated during school hours. Weekend makeup clinics will be provided in every municipality for those students absent at the time of scheduled in-school vaccination events.

The success of our school immunization campaign relies heavily on strong communication.

We are developing a master contact list for school clinics including contact information for the superintendent / head of school and the H1N1 district coordinator. The district coordinator will be the designated single point of contact with the Rhode Island Department of Health. The responsibilities include scheduling and handling logistical issues in your school district. The Superintendent/Head of School can be the district H1N1 coordinator. **Please identify**

**a district coordinator that will assist with H1N1 vaccination clinics as soon as possible and submit the information on the attached form no later than Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>.**

In this mailing please find:

- Contact list information for the Superintendent/Head of School and H1N1 coordinator to be submitted to the RI Department of Health.
- Previously sent cover letter and survey from The Wellness Company, please encourage all schools in your district to return this survey to The Wellness Company.
- Meeting summary from the school leadership conference call on 9/30/09 including questions and answers from the call.

We rely on your support to maintain a healthy school environment and ensure that all children are protected against vaccine preventable diseases.

Sincerely,

David Gifford, MD, MPH  
Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

## **Minutes of Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> school leadership conference call on H1N1**

### **General Updates**

1. The School Leadership Call will now move to a weekly call – as we transition into an operations phase and get closer to the start of statewide school vaccination clinics

2. We will be disseminating the notes to these calls through email and on the web and include any questions and answers from the call
3. We also encourage you to submit questions in advance to Rosemary Reilly-Chammat at the Department of Health so that we can make these calls as valuable to you as possible. Rosemary's email address is [Rosemary.Reilly-Chammat@health.ri.gov](mailto:Rosemary.Reilly-Chammat@health.ri.gov)

### **Vaccine Distribution and Dispatch**

1. Much of our planning and scheduling for vaccine clinics is dependent on the amount and presentation of vaccine we receive from CDC and their distribution company. Although we may begin ordering vaccine today, the doses available in the first distribution run will not be adequate or appropriate for school clinics.
2. Distribution is likely to be complicated – 4 depots for vaccine; 2 depots for ancillary kits; multiple presentations over different weeks
3. We are emphasizing that the first phase of the H1N1 vaccination campaign will go on for 6 to 10 weeks – this will be a difficult message given the media attention to the availability of vaccine
4. Kids and Pregnant women first
5. Children 4 years and younger will go to their pediatricians; school-aged children (5 – 18) will be vaccinated in school clinics; young adults will be vaccinated in college and university based clinics and special public clinics.

## **School Clinics: General**

1. We have finalized the State's vaccination plan – including the school based clinics -- and will make it and a summary available to you in the next couple of days.
2. Review of the school clinic model:
  - a. Generally, we are preparing to vaccinate at middle and high schools during the day; elementary schools in the evening or on weekends. This is the general approach and we anticipate some customization from this model.
  - b. The school clinic program is a partnership between the Department of Health, Department of Education, the schools, the state's Medical Reserve Corps and the Wellness Company.

## **School Clinics: Scheduling**

1. Given the uncertainty about vaccine availability, we will be developing a generic school clinic schedule – Vaccine Week 1, Vaccine Week 2, etc. Once we get our distribution numbers from the CDC, we will be able to lock in the dates.
2. We hope to have a DRAFT School Clinic Schedule to you for review by October 8<sup>th</sup>.
3. Between October 8 and October 15, we will work with the schools to finalize the schedule – “Final but flexible” – using a small scheduling team (formerly the Regional Coordinators) made up of staff from the Department of Education and the Department of Health. We hope to have the “final but flexible” school clinic plan by October 15<sup>th</sup>.

## **School Clinics: Communication**

1. We apologize for the confusion we brought about with the school surveys that went out from the Wellness Company a couple of weeks ago. We – both the Health and the Wellness Company -- learned many important lessons from this experience – one of which was that we should send nothing out directly to the schools without giving the district or independent school leadership a copy first. We also learned that giving a verbal heads up on one of these calls is not enough either.
2. Moving forward, we will be sending out the notes to these calls. In addition, we will be notifying leadership in advance of any communications going on directly with schools.
3. Master Contact List: to facilitate this communication, we need to have a master contact list. Specifically we would like to have contact information – address, office phone, cell phone, email and fax numbers for the Superintendents and Heads of School, their lead designee for H1N1 response (if any), the Principal of each school and his/her administrative contact for the school based clinic.
4. Request Letter: tomorrow we will send out a request letter outlining the information we need and where to send it.
5. School Survey: with this letter you will also receive a copy of the school survey the Wellness Company sent out two weeks ago. We will be resending this survey to the schools, since it appears now that we will need additional information. This is an example of us getting out over our skies; we hope not to repeat the error and beg your pardon and cooperation.

## **School Clinics: Operations Issues**

1. School Clinic Kits: Over the next 10 days, the Wellness Company in consultation with the Department of Education and Health will put together a collection of School Clinic Kits. Each Kit will contain all the administrative supplies necessary to operate a School Based Clinic – for example, accordion files for consent forms, extra consent forms, signs, markers, tape and general instructions about how a clinic will operate. Next week, we will review the contents of the Kits.
2. The School Clinic Kits will be mailed to the designated administrative contact for each school.
3. The administrative contact for each school – depending on the school and the district, this may need to be done as a team effort. We also recommend connecting the school nurse teachers to this effort as well if possible.
4. We are currently planning to hold review or training sessions via conference calls for the administrative contacts and the principals to give them an opportunity to review the Kit with us and ask questions. We will have more details next week about when these sessions will be scheduled.

## **Other Issues**

DCYF – we are currently working with DCYF to ensure that children under their care have opportunity to receive vaccine either in school-based clinics with appropriate consent or through other avenues. We hope to have more details about this next week.

Healthcare Service Regions School Sites: As part of the state's pandemic flu response plan, Rhode Island has been divided into 10 Healthcare Service Regions (HSRs), each headed up by a

community hospital. For the H1N1 response, the HSRs will be activating pods to vaccinate healthcare workers and first responders. The following schools have been identified as pod sites for this response:

Landmark Medical: North Smithfield HS\*

Fatima: North Providence HS\*

Kent: West Warwick HS

South County Hospital: North Kingstown HS\*

Newport: Gaudet Middle School in Middletown\*

Westerly: Springbrook Elementary

The Miriam Hospital: Martin Middle School in East Providence

\*denotes schools that will also serve as Alternate Care Sites if needed

### **Review of key dates:**

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|-----------|---|
| October 1 | Letters to Superintendents and Independent School Leadership requesting contact information and providing copies of the school surveys – contact information will be due to us by Tuesday, October 6 <sup>th</sup> (quick turnaround) |
| October 1 | Wellness Company will resend the school surveys – this time using Department of Health letterhead so as to avoid confusion  |
| October 7 | Next Superintendent/School Leadership call; Draft Clinic Schedule   |
| October 8 | Send out Draft Clinic Schedule  |



October 8-14 The RIDE/HEALTH Scheduling Team to work with schools to finalize the Schedule

October 15 Final but Flexible School Clinic Schedule

### **Questions and Answers**

Q. Can children from MA and CT, who attend school in RI, receive the H1N1 vaccine at the school clinic?

A. Yes, all children enrolled in the school, grades kindergarten–12, can receive the vaccine.

Q. Can school staff receive the vaccine at the school-based clinic?

A. No, only students can receive the vaccine at the school clinic. Staff members who are pregnant should contact their provider for H1N1 vaccine. Staff between the ages of 25-64 years old with high-risk health conditions will be able to receive vaccine from their provider or at another specified public health clinic. Immunizing students in school can help reduce spread of H1N1 among the entire school population.

Q. When will consent forms go out to parents?

A. Letters to parents including consent forms and vaccine information will be mailed soon. An update will be provided on the conference call next week. An electronic copy will be sent to all school leaders so you will have extra copies if necessary for distribution and posting on school and district websites. Parents of home-schooled children will also receive information. Home-schooled children can receive vaccine at their designated school.

Q. Are there any resources to help compensate school coordinators for work beyond the school day?

A. The State does not have additional resources to support administrative costs at schools for the school-based clinics.

Q. Will the vaccine used at the school clinics contain thimerosal?

A. The amount of thimerosal depends on the type of vaccine. Flu mist contains live virus and no thimerosal and will not be used in school clinics. Single dose vials of vaccine may contain trace amounts of thimerosal and will not be used in school clinics. Multi dose vaccine vials contain thimerosal and will be used to supply school clinics. Parents who do not want their children to receive vaccine with thimerosal should contact their provider. Parents who choose this option may have to wait longer to have their child vaccinated because school clinics are prioritized first in vaccine distribution plans..

Q. What is the age of consent to sign for vaccine?

A. Students 18 years of age and older can sign consent. All secondary school students must assent to the vaccine at the time of vaccination. Students can refuse the vaccine on the day of the school clinic.

Q. What age groups are covered in the school based vaccine effort?

A. Children, 5 years and older, can participate in the school based vaccine program. Children enrolled at school, 4 years old and younger, can receive vaccine from their provider.

Q. What are the side effects of the H1N1 vaccine?

A. The H1N1 vaccine is being manufactured by the same company that supplies seasonal flu vaccine. The side effects are

identical to seasonal flu vaccine. Children who run a low-grade fever following vaccine may attend school.